

## Message Text

PAGE 01 STATE 308333  
ORIGIN SS-15

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /016 R

66011

DRAFTED BY IO/UNA:BJSHARP

APPROVED BY IO/UNA:AFHOLLOWAY

S/S-O:JGUNDERSEN

-----024566 281852Z /40

P 281730Z DEC 77

FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 308333

EXDIS FOR AMB YOUNG FROM UNA

FOLLOWING REPEAT NEW DELHI 18465 ACTION STATE DEC 27.

QUOTE C O N F I D E N T I A L NEW DELHI 18465

EXDIS

FOR THE PRESIDENT FROM AMBASSADOR GOHEEN

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: OVIP (CARTER, JIMMY)

SUBJECT: OBSERVATIONS CONCERNING PRIME MINISTER DESAI

1. IT MAY BE HELPFUL FOR YOU TO HAVE SOME OF MY PERSONAL PERCEPTIONS OF HOW PRIME MINISTER DESAI LOOKS ON YOUR VISIT AND PARTICULARLY OF ATTITUDES AND CONSTRAINTS THAT ARE LIKELY TO GUIDE HIS APPROACH TO ISSUES THAT YOU WILL BE DISCUSSING. IN SENDING YOU THESE OBSERVATIONS, I HAVE SOUGHT TO SUPPLEMENT RATHER THAN TO DUPLICATE THOSE CONTAINED IN THE "SCOPE PAPER" PREPARED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE. THE LAST VERSION OF THE LATTER WHICH WE HAVE CONFIDENTIAL

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SEEN HERE SEEMS TO THIS EMBASSY TO BE ON TARGET  
IN ALL RESPECTS.

2. ATMOSPHERICS: BEFORE DISCUSSING THE PRIME MINISTER'S VIEWS, I WOULD LIKE TO ASSURE YOU THAT THERE IS WIDESPREAD POPULAR INTEREST IN YOUR IMPENDING VISIT TO NEW DELHI. YOUR POLICIES WITH RESPECT TO SOUTHERN AFRICA AND YOUR DECLARED INTEREST IN INDIA AND IN THE PROBLEMS OF THE THIRD WORLD HAVE WON MUCH APPROVAL HERE. MORE PARTICULARLY, YOUR VISIT IS SEEN TO MARK A RECOGNITION

OF INDIA'S PLACE IN THE WORLD, A WELCOME AFFIRMATION OF SHARED DEMOCRATIC VALUES, AND THE LAUNCHING OF A NEW ERA OF GOOD RELATIONS BETWEEN INDIA AND THE UNITED STATES. AS THESE STATEMENTS IMPLY, POPULAR EXPECTATIONS SEEM TO BE GENERAL RATHER THAN SPECIFIC. THERE APPEARS NOW TO BE LITTLE SPECULATION THAT YOU WILL COME OFFERING ANY BIG HANDOUTS. IN RECENT DAYS THERE HAVE BEEN INCREASED EXPRESSIONS OF CONCERN IN THE PARLIAMENT AND IN THE PRESS THAT YOU MIGHT TRY TO EXACT CONCESSIONS FROM INDIA ON NUCLEAR MATTERS THAT WOULD CHALLENGE INDIA'S SOVEREIGNTY AND INHIBIT HER DEVELOPMENT OF NUCLEAR ENERGY. THE GOVERNMENT'S SPOKESMEN HAVE REITERATED THAT INDIA WILL NOT BE COERCED IN THESE MATTERS, AND MOST POPULAR OPINION SEEMS TO BE THAT OUR DIFFERENCES OVER NUCLEAR POLICY WILL NOT BE ALLOWED TO SPOIL "THE NEW BEGINNING" IN CORDIAL RELATIONS BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES.

3. IN PRIME MINISTER DESAI'S MIND, YOUR VISIT IS AN IMPORTANT COUNTER-BALANCE TO HIS RECENT VISIT TO MOSCOW. IT CAPS, AS IT WERE, HIS EFFORT TO ESTABLISH A FOREIGN POLICY OF "GENUINE NON-ALIGNMENT" AND HAVE IT RECOGNIZED AS SUCH. HIS AIM IN "GENUINE NON-ALIGNMENT", WITH AN EMPHASIS ON THE WORD "GENUINE", IS AN INDIA THAT IS CONFIDENTIAL

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ON EQUALLY GOOD TERMS WITH THE MAJOR POWERS AND ONE THAT IS ACCEPTED BY THEM AS A SOVERIGN EQUAL, NOT REGARDED AS DEPENDENT OR TIED INTO ANY "SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP". THERE IS NO QUESTION BUT THAT IDEOLOGICALLY THE PRIME MINISTER IS MORE IN TUNE WITH THE UNITED STATES AND THE WESTERN DEMOCRACIES THAN WITH THE SOVIET UNION AND OTHER COMMUNIST NATIONS. BUT HE DOES NOT WANT INDIA TO GET CAUGHT AGAIN IN EITHER AN IDEOLOGICAL OR POWER STRUGGLE BETWEEN THE EAST AND THE WEST. ABOVE ALL, HE WISHES TO ESTABLISH AND HAVE RECOGNIZED INDIA'S INDEPENDENCE AND INTEGRITY.

4. AS YOU KNOW FROM HIS CORRESPONDENCE, THE PRIME MINISTER FEELS THAT YOU AND HE SHARE VERY BASIC RELIGIOUS AND MORAL VALUES. HE HOPES, I BELIEVE, THAT THESE CAN HELP TO BUILD NOT SIMPLY GOOD RELATIONS BUT FRIENDSHIP, MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING AND RESPECT BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES. HE WILL THEREFORE BE MOST INTERESTED WHETHER YOU PERCEIVE INDIA'S BEST INTERESTS AS HE DOES. THEREFORE LET ME EXPAND A LITTLE MORE ON THIS MATTER OF NON-ALIGNMENT. THE PRIME MINISTER BELIEVES THAT IN BOTH ITS INTERNAL DEVELOPMENT AND ITS EXTERNAL RELATIONS, INDIA SHOULD CHOOSE ITS OWN COURSE AND MAKE ITS OWN DESTINY TO THE FULLEST EXTENT POSSIBLE. HENCE HE FREQUENTLY CITES THE VIRTUES OF SELF-RELIANCE AND FEARLESSNESS AND OPPOSES INDIA CONSIDERING ITSELF

A PART OF ANY BLOC. THIS DESIRE TO HAVE INDIA STAND ON ITS OWN FEET APPLIES TO ITS POSITION IN THE SO-CALLED NON-ALIGNED MOVEMENT, THE GROUP OF 77, AND AMONG THE DEMOCRACIES. BUT IT DOES NOT PRECLUDE WORKING TO ADVANCE COMMON INTERESTS WITH ANY OR ALL OF THE FOREGOING; NEITHER, IN PRACTICAL TERMS, IS THE PRIME MINISTER LIKELY TO FIND IT IN INDIA'S SELF-INTEREST TO TAKE STRONG, OVERT POSITIONS AGAINST MAJORITIES IN EITHER THE NON-ALIGNED MOVEMENT OF THE GROUP OF 77.  
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5. A PARALLEL VIEW, HELD AS A MATTER OF BOTH PRINCIPLE AND PRUDENCE, IS THAT EACH NATION HAS A RIGHT TO DETERMINE ITS OWN FORM OF SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ORGANIZATION. CONSEQUENTLY, EXCEPT WHERE PATENT RACISM IS INVOLVED (E.G., IN SOUTHERN AFRICA), THE PRIME MINISTER BELIEVES THAT INDIA SHOULD FOREGO CRITICISM OF OTHER SOCIETIES. HIS RESERVATIONS ON THIS SCORE EXTEND TO THE EMPHASIS ON HUMAN RIGHTS THAT WE HAVE INSERTED INTO AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY, EVEN THOUGH HE HIMSELF HAS BEEN A VERY STRONG CHAMPION OF HUMAN RIGHTS WITHIN THE INDIAN SOCIETY FOR MANY, MANY YEARS. THE PRIME MINISTER WOULD NOT HOLD THE JOB HE HAS UNLESS THERE WERE STRONG STREAKS OF PRAGMATISM AND PRACTICALITY IN HIM ALONGSIDE HIS DEEP MORAL IDEALISM. A DESIRE NOT TO ANTAGONIZE THE SOVIETS AND ENDANGER THEIR ARMS SUPPLY TO INDIA SEEMS TO ME CLEARLY TO BE AN IMPORTANT ELEMENT IN THE RESERVATIONS JUST CITED. LIKEWISE, INDIA UNDER HIS DIRECTION REMAINS MORE THAT SCRUPULOUS ABOUT NOT DOING OR SAYING ANYTHING THE MIGHT SEEM PRO-ISRAEL AND SO ENDANGER ITS RELATIONS WITH THE ARAB STATES AS OIL SUPPLIERS AND AS POTENTIAL SUPPORTERS OF MOSLEM PAKISTAN AGAINST INDIAN INTERESTS.

6. THE PRIME MINISTER HEADS A CABINET THAT IS STILL A COLLECTION OF MEN WITH DIFFERING VIEWS, LOYALTIES, AND AMBITIONS, RATHER THAN A COHESIVE ENTITY. - WITH RESPECT TO FOREIGN AFFAIRS, IN COMPANY WITH FOREIGN MINISTER VAJPAYEE HE SEEMS TO HAVE ESTABLISHED, ALONG THE LINES INDICATED ABOVE, EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP AND CLEAR POLICIES WHICH HAVE GENERAL ACCEPTANCE OR AT LEAST HAVE ENCOUNTERED NO SERIOUS OVERT CHALLENGES. THE SAME APPLIES  
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TO THE PORTFOLIOS WHICH THE PRIME MINISTER HOLDS FOR ATOMIC ENERGY, SPACE, AND SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY. WITH RESPECT TO DOMESTIC AFFAIRS, HIS TECHNIQUE HAS BEEN TO GIVE THE SEVERAL MINISTERS GREAT LEEWAY IN THEIR RESPECTIVE AREAS OF RESPONSIBILITY AND TO TRY THROUGH

PATIENCE AND CONSIDERATION TO HOLD TOGETHER COMPETING PERSONALITIES AND INTERESTS. THE RESULTS HAVE BEEN LITTLE REAL MOVEMENT TO DATE IN THE AREAS OF ECONOMIC POLICY AND DEVELOPMENT AND AN OFTEN MEDIOCRE ADMINISTRATIVE PERFORMANCE. THESE FACTS APPEAR TO REFLECT LIMITS THAT THE PRIME MINISTER PERCEIVES TO HIS POWER TO LEAD IN THESE AREAS RATHER THAN LACK OF CONCERN OR CONVICTION, FOR WHILE HE IS RESPECTED BY HIS COLLEAGUES, HIS OWN POLITICAL BASE IS NOT SUCH THAT HE CAN IMPOSE HIS WILL ON THEM.

7. IN THE AREA OF NUCLEAR POLICY, THE PRIME MINISTER TOOK A VERY COURAGEOUS STEP IN DECLARING THAT HIS GOVERNMENT WOULD NOT PURSUE THE DEVELOPMENT OF EXPLOSIVE DEVICES. HE MADE THAT DECISION AS A MATTER OF MORAL CONVICTION, BECAUSE HE BELIEVES THE POSSESSION OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS WOULD NOT STRENGTHEN INDIA'S SECURITY, AND BECAUSE HE MUST ALSO HAVE BEEN AWARE THAT HE COULD SUSTAIN HIS POSITION AGAINST DISSENTERS IN HIS OWN PARTY AS WELL AS IN THE OPPOSITION PARTIES. WHEN IT COMES TO THE ACCEPTANCE OF FULL-SCOPE SAFEGUARDS, HOWEVER, MUCH LESS CLEAR ARE BOTH HIS OWN PRIVATE VIEWS AND HIS ABILITY TO SURMOUNT WHAT IS CLEARLY WIDESPREAD AND INFLUENTIAL OPPOSITION TO SUCH A STEP WITHIN HIS OWN PARTY, IN THE CONGRESS PARTY, AND IN INDIA'S SCIENTIFIC ESTABLISHMENT.

8. THE PRIME MINISTER HAS STATED PUBLICLY THAT HE WOULD NEVER ACCEPT ANY AGREEMENT THAT WAS DISCRIMINATORY, OR THAT MADE INDIA SUBSERVIENT TO AN EXTERNAL POWER, OR THAT IMPEDED INDIA'S DEVELOPMENT OF NUCLEAR SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY. WHETHER HE CAN RECONCILE IN HIS OWN MIND  
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HIS DEEP CONVICTIONS ABOUT INDIA'S INDEPENDENCE AND SOVEREIGNTY AND THE ACCEPTANCE OF SAFEGUARDS ADMINISTERED BY THE IAEA, IN WHICH INDIA IS HARDLY AN OUTSIDER, IS SOMETHING THAT WE SIMPLY DO NOT KNOW. EVEN IF HE SHOULD BE ABLE TO MAKE THIS RECONCILIATION PERSONALLY, TWO THINGS SEEM CLEAR: (A) HE WOULD REACT NEGATIVELY, OUT OF BOTH PERSONAL AND NATIONAL PRIDE, IF THERE WERE ANY INDICATION THAT AMERICA WAS TRYING TO STRONG-ARM HIM; AND (B) HE WOULD HAVE A HARD TIME OVERRIDING THE NOISY AND PASSIONATE OPPOSITION THAT HE KNOWS A PUBLIC ENDORSEMENT OF FULL-SCOPE SAFEGUARDS WILL AROUSE AMONG MEMBERS OF INDIA'S POLITICAL AND INTELLECTUAL ELITES. IF, THEN, YOU CAN MOVE HIM TOWARD THE ACCEPTANCE OF FULL-SCOPE SAFEGUARDS, AS WE HOPE THAT YOU CAN, WE BELIEVE THAT HE WILL NEED BOTH TIME AND ALL THE PERSUASIVE ARGUMENTS THAT YOU CAN GIVE HIM TO BUILD BROADER SUPPORT FOR THE STEP BEFORE HE CAN ANNOUNCE IT AS A MATTER OF PUBLIC POLICY.

9. ONE THING NOT ADEQUATELY RECOGNIZED IN THE " SCOPE PAPER" IS THE EXTENT TO WHICH CHINA FIGURES IN THE RATIONALIZATIONS OF INDIA'S LEADERS. ON THE NON-PROLIFERATION FRONT , THE PRIME MINISTER IS LIKELY TO ASK YOU WHAT OUR GOVERNMENT IS DOING TO DETER CHINA FROM THE DEVELOPMENT AND USE OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS. THE IMPLICATION USUALLY IS THAT IF THE WESTERN POWERS ARE NOT LEANING ON CHINA TO FOREGO NUCLEAR PROLIFERATION, THEY SHOULD NOT BE LEANING ON A PEACE-LOVING COUNTRY LIKE INDIA WHICH HAS RENOUNCED NUCLEAR EXPLOSIONS.

10. ON THE INDIAN OCEAN I HAVE NOT FOUND EITHER THE PRIME MINISTER OR THE FOREIGN MINISTER TO BE ASSERTIVE ABOUT THE IDEA OF AN INDIAN OCEAN ZONE OF PEACE.  
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PRIVATELY THEY HAVE BEEN BOTH RELAXED ABOUT AND APPRECIATIVE OF THE BILATERAL US-USSR TALKS, ALTHOUGH PUBLICLY THE GOI CONTINUES TO AIM AT THE REMOVAL OF ALL EXTERNAL MILITARY FORCES FROM THE INDIAN OCEAN AREA. INDIA'S LONG-STANDING AMBITION TO BE RECOGNIZED AS THE DOMINANT REGIONAL POWER AND A MAJOR FORCE IN THE WORLD, DOES, I BELIEVE, GUIDE ITS LEADERS TO WANT TO BE THE MONITORS OF THE INDIAN OCEAN AND THE ASSURERS OF SECURITY IN THE REGION, PERHAPS IN COMPANY WITH IRAN, BUT THEY ARE REALIST ENOUGH  
NOT TO WANT TO PUSH HARD FOR THAT OBJECTIVE NOW.

11. IF DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE BECOMES A SUBJECT FOR DISCUSSION, YOU WILL FIND THE PRIME MINISTER A PROUD MAN NOT LOOKING FOR HANDOUTS. HE IS UNLIKELY TO PRESENT INDIA AS POVERTY RIDDEN; HE IS MORE LIKELY TO STRESS INDIA'S STRENGTHS AND POTENTIALITIES TO WHICH WE CAN VARIOUSLY RELATE IN HELPFUL WAYS, AS, FOR EXAMPLE, THROUGH THE TRANSFER OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY. THE RESUMPTION OF BILATERAL DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE, WHICH WE ARE NOW DISCUSSING AT THE LEVEL OF \$60 MILLION FOR FY'78, IS REGARDED MORE AS A POLITICAL GESTURE, AN EXPRESSION OF GOODWILL ON BOTH SIDES, THAN AS A MATTER OF MUCH ECONOMIC MOMENT. INDIA'S PREFERENCES FOR RESOURCE TRANSFERS ARE THROUGH MULTILATERAL CHANNELS AND DEBT-RELIEF, BOTH OF WHICH IT REGARDS TO ENTAIL LESS PSYCHOLOGICAL DEPENDENCY. AT THE SAME TIME, HOWEVER, US AID THROUGH BILATERAL AS WELL AS THROUGH MULTILATERAL CHANNELS HAS A PARTICULAR SIGNIFICANCE FOR INDIA BECAUSE OF AMERICA'S WEIGHT IN THE CONSORTIUM AND THE IMPORTANCE THAT THE INDIAN ATTACH TO OUR EXAMPLE THERE FOR THE OTHER DONORS.

12. WE HAVE BEEN PICKING UP SOME INDICATIONS HERE, AS HAS ALSO THE DEPARTMENT IN WASHINGTON, THAT THE DESAI GOVERNMENT IS INTERESTED IN REDUCING ITS DEPENDENCE UPON

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THE SOVIETS FOR MILITARY EQUIPMENT. IT SEEMS UNLIKELY, HOWEVER, THAT THE PRIME MINISTER WILL SEEK TO ESTABLISH A MAJOR ARMS SUPPLY RELATIONSHIP WITH THE UNITED STATES UNDER CURRENT CIRCUMSTANCES. HIS GOVERNMENT IS WELL AWARE OF THE LIMITATIONS LAID DOWN IN YOUR ARMS-SUPPLY POLICY BOTH AS IT APPLIES GLOBALLY AND IN THIS REGION. INDIA'S LEADERS ALSO REMEMBER THE INSTABILITY THAT HAS CHARACTERIZED US-INDIAN RELATIONS IN THE PAST. THEY THEREFORE WILL BE RELUCTANT TO ASSUME ANY SORT OF HEAVY DEPENDENCY UPON US UNTIL THE "NEW BEGGINING" HAS SHOWN A PROVED CAPACITY TO PRODUCE A FIRMER AND MORE CONSISTENT RELATIONSHIP THAT THAT WHICH INDIA AND THE UNITED STATES HAVE ENJOYED OVER INDIA'S THIRTY YEARS OF LIFE AS A NATION.

13. ON A PERSONAL LEVEL, I HAVE FOUND THE PRIME MINISTER FRIENDLY AND EASY TO TALK WITH. WHEN HE FIRST STANDS UP HE MAY MOVE SLOWLY, AS BEFITS HIS AGE, BUT THERE IS NOTHING CREAKY ABOUT HIS MIND. IT IS CLEAR AND INCISIVE. HE IS A MAN OF PRINCIPLE WHO SPEAKS IN A STRAIGHTFORWARD MANNER AND EXPECTS HIS WORDS TO BE BELIEVED AND TRUSTED. OCCASSIONALLY HE TENDS TO BE LACONIC; BUT HE LISTENS CLOSELY; HAS AN ACTIVE, QUIET SENSE OF HUMOR; AND SEEMS TO ENJOY THE GIVE AND TAKE OF DISCUSSION. MANY SAY THAT HIS EXTENDED PERIOD IN JAIL DURING THE EMERGENCY HAS MELLOWED HIM AND MADE HIM LESS DOGMATIC AND INFLEXIBLE THAN HE WAS EARLIER REPUTED TO BE. MY OWN EXPERIENCE TENDS TO CONFIRM THAT HIS EXTRAORDINARY INTERNAL SELF-DISCIPLINE HAS FEWER SHARP EXTERNAL EDGES NOW THAN USED TO BE THE CASE. I FIND HIM VERY MUCH AT PEACE WITH HIMSELF. GOHEEN UNQUOTE VANCE

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## Message Attributes

**Automatic Decaptioning:** Z  
**Capture Date:** 22-Sep-1999 12:00:00 am  
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**Current Classification:** UNCLASSIFIED  
**Concepts:** n/a  
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**Copy:** SINGLE  
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**Decaption Date:** 22 May 2009  
**Decaption Note:** 25 YEAR REVIEW  
**Disposition Action:** RELEASED  
**Disposition Approved on Date:**  
**Disposition Case Number:** n/a  
**Disposition Comment:** 25 YEAR REVIEW  
**Disposition Date:** 22 May 2009  
**Disposition Event:**  
**Disposition History:** n/a  
**Disposition Reason:**  
**Disposition Remarks:**  
**Document Number:** 1977STATE308333  
**Document Source:** ADS  
**Document Unique ID:** 00  
**Drafter:** IO/UNA:BJSHARP  
**Enclosure:** n/a  
**Executive Order:** 11652 GDS  
**Errors:** n/a  
**Expiration:**  
**Film Number:** D770483-0836  
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**Office:** ORIGIN SS  
**Original Classification:** CONFIDENTIAL  
**Original Handling Restrictions:** EXDIS  
**Original Previous Classification:** n/a  
**Original Previous Handling Restrictions:** n/a  
**Page Count:** 6  
**Previous Channel Indicators:**  
**Previous Classification:** CONFIDENTIAL  
**Previous Handling Restrictions:** EXDIS  
**Reference:** n/a  
**Retention:** 0  
**Review Action:** RELEASED, APPROVED  
**Review Content Flags:**  
**Review Date:** 13-Oct-2004 12:00:00 am  
**Review Event:**  
**Review Exemptions:** n/a  
**Review Media Identifier:**  
**Review Release Date:** n/a  
**Review Release Event:** n/a  
**Review Transfer Date:**  
**Review Withdrawn Fields:** n/a  
**SAS ID:** 119953  
**Secure:** OPEN  
**Status:** NATIVE  
**Subject:** OBSERVATIONS CONCERNING PRIME MINISTER DESAI  
**TAGS:** OVIP, (CARTER, JIMMY)  
**To:** USUN N Y  
**Type:** TE  
**vdkgvwkey:** odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS\_Docs/fef65dfc-c188-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc  
**Review Markings:**  
Margaret P. Grafeld  
Declassified/Released  
US Department of State  
EO Systematic Review  
22 May 2009  
**Markings:** Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009